

Saints and Sinners

Chapter 8

Jack walked through the front door, was immediately hounded by his mother. The short woman stomped over to him, pointed a finger and began scolding him the moment he closed the house's front door behind himself.

"And where the hell have you been?" She demanded, eyes narrowed. "I didn't spend all day slaving over-"

Jack stopped listening. He knew all too well how this interaction would go. His mother would bitch and whine about how she'd worked so hard to make dinner, and how ungrateful and selfish he was for letting it go cold. Blah, blah, manners. Blah, blah, responsibility.

He walked past her, ignored her as she shouted at him.

Thankfully, she didn't follow him to the kitchen. He could hear her muttering loudly about him, but that was nothing new.

Inside the kitchen, Jack found his sister.

She was leaning over the sink lifting a plate out of soapy water and giving it a good scrub. Her back was to him and, hunched over as she was, he got an excellent view of her backside. A nice, round bottom that Jack had to forcibly drag his eyes away from.

He walked to the fridge, into his sister's peripheral vision.

"Pasta," Devyn said, glancing at Jack apologetically. "Mom threw away the leftovers. I tried to get her to leave some for you, but..."

She shrugged, turned back washing dishes.

"Not a fan of pasta anyway," Jack lied. "Too Italian."

"Italian is bad?" Devyn smiled, setting the now-clean, still-wet plate on the draining board and fishing another out of the sink.

"It's not *bad*," Jack said, closing the fridge door. "I just prefer spicier stuff, is all. Mexican. Pasta is too bland."

"I like it."

"You like *everything*."

So, what was he going to eat today? A frozen pizza, most likely. Or a microwave meal. Or, Jack supposed, he could go loot some nice food from someone else's house while time was frozen. But, somehow, that felt *wrong*. Like using superpowers to pickpocket someone instead of robbing a bank. It'd be like an insult on his ability, using it for something so trivial.

He stood there silently, watching his sister clean dishes. If she was uncomfortable with his staring, she didn't show it.

It was only when Devyn plucked a fifth plate out of the sink that Jack felt it. An odd sense of foreboding. His eyes narrowed at that fifth plate, then darted to the draining board and the five sets of knives and forks resting there.

One for their mother, another for their father, one for Devyn, and one set out for Jack. Four. There should only be *four* plates.

"Did Dad bring his boss home again?" Jack found himself asking, dreading the worst. "Or did Aunt Nora stop by?"

Devyn glanced at him, raised an eyebrow.

"Five plates," Jack said.

"Oh!" Devyn smiled wide. "No. It wasn't either of them. Drake came over, wanted to meet Mom and Dad. He left just a few minutes before you got here, actually. I'm surprised you didn't see him."

Jack clenched his fists, kept the rage from his face and voice.

"Drake wanted to meet Mom and Dad?" He asked, keeping his voice as calm and level as he could. "How come?"

"Didn't you hear?" Devyn said happily, a bright smile in her voice. "He asked me to the dance. I guess you could say we're officially dating now."

Jack stepped away from Alyssa, crossed his arms.

"I don't suppose," he said aloud, "there's any way to make me invisible, is there?"

The shadows at his feet congealed, transformed.

A moment later, there stood Damien. In the same black suit as always. Red eyes glowing with amusement and curiosity.

"Invisible? No."

"Figures," Jack said, looking around Alyssa's bedroom. Frozen in time, trapped in shades of grey. "Even if I *could* turn invisible, what good would it do me? As long as I'm wearing the ring, time is stuck. There's no-one to be invisible from."

He sat down on Alyssa's bed, stared at the back of the girl's head. Above her, there were dozens of black clouds. A web of lines connecting one to another to another.

"It sucks," he said, "not being able to see it. I'm close to making her fuck her father. I can feel it. But, when they do have sex, I won't be able to watch it. Either time will be frozen, or I'll be visible. I can't risk getting caught."

He *had* to make it happen. He *had* to get Alyssa in bed with her father. It wasn't an option any more.

Devyn was going to the dance with Drake.

Jack knew Drake. Knew that bastard's plans for his sister. If Devyn went to the dance with him, she wouldn't be coming home a virgin. And the idea of that – the thought of *Drake* on top of his sister – it wasn't something Jack could bare.

He'd kill Drake before that asshole had a chance to defile and use Devyn.

But that – murder – wouldn't be necessary. Not if he could get Alyssa into her father's bed. Not if he could prove that it was possible, that he could claim his sister's heart. With his Black Ring, he could turn Devyn away from Drake – make her hate him as much as Jack did.

He just needed to prove it was possible. If he could do it with Alyssa, he could do it with Devyn.

"My ring can't make you *invisible*," Damien said, staring at Jack. "But it *can* do something close."

Jack turned to the shadow man, narrowed his eyes.

"What?" Damien cocked a smile. "You didn't ask, so I didn't-"

"I want to know everything," Jack snapped. "Stop holding back on me. Tell me everything that this ring can do. All of it!"

"Learn to walk before you try to run," Damien said with a shake of his head. "Learning everything at once would overwhelm you. Much better to discover and learn one ability at a time."

Jack glared at his shadowed companion.

"You can blend into shadows," Damien sighed. "The darker the shadow, the better. You won't be completely invisible; if someone shines a light on the shadow you're hiding in, you'll be exposed. But it's close enough to invisibility for your needs."

"Can I do that without wearing the ring?"

Damien shook his head. "Focus," the shadow man told Jack. "Feel the ring's power in you."

Jack hesitated for a brief moment before doing as Damien instructed. He focused on himself, his body. The lack of a heartbeat and his lungs that didn't need air. He could feel the blackness coating his body, a cold layer of darkness covering him head to toes. And his finger. The middle finger of his right hand, the one with red symbols slowly rotating around the ring there.

"When you put on the ring, you accept its power – its hold over you. And, when you

take it off, you remove that power.”

It was cold. The more he concentrated on it, the more Jack felt the icy cold metal. Chilly veins throughout his body. The oily, freezing layer of total darkness over his body.

How had he never felt *this* before?

“You don’t need to take the ring off. Simply *will* the power back inside it, reject it mentally.”

Jack focused, silently commanded the cold back into the ring.

The world shifted around him in an instant.

Dull greys - the lifeless hues of the frozen world – blossomed into life. Pink appeared on the walls, blue and green flashed blindingly from the bedroom window, Alyssa’s t-shirt faded from grey to red. Her arm moved, stylus in her hand as she sketched out a picture on her drawing pad.

Jack’s heart thumped in his chest.

He almost gasped. Almost revealed himself.

Damien was gone. No longer standing in the room.

Time had unfrozen. And he was there, in Alyssa’s room. Feet from her, sitting on her bed.

If she turned around...

Jack shut his eyes, willed the ring’s power back into himself.

And, when he opened his eyes, time had frozen once again.

Damien stood in front of him, white teeth shining.

Jack was silent for a long moment. Thoughts and implications and ideas coursing through his head. The greatest risk of owning the Black Ring had been losing it – or it being stolen. Taking it off whenever he wasn’t using it meant it had to stay in his pocket, or under his pillow, or on his bedside table. Places where it could easily ‘disappear’.

If he could wear it all the time, never having to take it off, that’d solve the problem. But it also introduced something new to worry about...

Jack set that thought aside for now, looked up at Damien.

“You said I can hide in shadows,” he said, pushing himself off Alyssa’s bed. “How?”

It started off slow. Alyssa shifting in bed, unable to sleep.

Every time she shut her eyes, seemed to be drifting off, Jack froze time – walked over to her, touched her, planted new thoughts in her head. Naughty thoughts. About her father.

He’d return to a dark corner of the room, meld into the shadows, and unfreeze time.

Alyssa rolled around in bed, uncomfortable.

Eventually, she gave up on sleeping. Slapping her pillow in frustration. She sat up in bed, face flushed. Wearing a thin, white nightie that contrasted with her naturally dark skin.

She pushed her blankets aside, looked down at herself.

“I can’t,” she told herself. “It’s wrong.”

Jack froze time again, stepped out of his shadow.

He couldn’t move while hiding in darkness. His body was still there, it was just... different. Like he *became* a shadow. Alyssa couldn’t see him, even if she was looking right where he was. All she’d see was the shadow.

He walked over to her, touched her shoulder and opened her mind.

It took just a few moments to erase her hesitation, to add ‘lust’ and ‘desire’ and ‘carefree’ to her current emotions. Robbing away her hesitation and doubt.

Then, just like he’d done a dozen times already, he returned to the shadows, made time resume.

“I can’t...” Alyssa breathed, hand sliding down her body.

A gasp escaped her lips.

Her hand between her legs, under her nightie’s skirt. From where Jack crouched in

the darkness, he couldn't see under Alyssa's skirt – couldn't see exactly what her fingers were doing. But he *could* she motion.

"I can't..." Alyssa whimpered. "I shouldn't..."

Her head lolled back, eyes shutting as her lips parted in a gentle sigh of pleasure.

"Dad..." She panted, falling back onto the bed, knees raising and parting, hand moving visibly between her legs. "Daddy..."

She was quiet. Her moans and whimpers barely audible, even with Jack just a few feet away. Her body shuddered, writhed. Her free hand slid along the side of her body, began cupping her breast over the nightie. Alyssa's fingertips found the protruding nipple, squeezing and pinching it as she spoke the same one word over and over again.

"Daddy... Daddy..."

Jack's nose caught the musky scent. He tasted it in the air.

Alyssa's hips began to move, grinding her crotch against her hand – thrusting on her own fingers.

"God," she breathed, a little louder now. Her hand shot away from her breast, up to her face to cover her mouth. "Please..."

Her feet curled, back curving as her hips lifted up.

"Da-"

The rest of the word was cut off by a sharp gasp, a long, muffled moan. Body trembling for a moment before collapsing back down onto the mattress, slumping and sprawling.

Jack watched it all, unmoving. Eyes wide. Heart thumping.

He'd expected her to fall asleep after that. To pass out in the post-orgasmic bliss. But, instead, Alyssa sat up in bed, looked down at herself. Her face red, nipples hard under her nightie.

"I can't believe," she sighed, lifting her hand. "Wow."

Her fingers were drenched, glossy and shiny in the darkness.

From where he crouched, Jack could just about see the puddle on the bed. The dark patches on Alyssa's white nightie.

The girl shook her head, sighed.

As she climbed out of bed, Jack froze time one last time.

He walked over to her, touched her and then the cloud that spawned above her.

Her emotions were a mess. Difficult to read and understand.

A lot of conflict about what she'd just done; masturbating thinking about her father. A lot of emotions she didn't want to deal with, what with how tired she felt. Instead, she seemed to be focused on her nightie and bedsheets. Wanting to clean them quickly, wash the sweat off herself while she was at it.

Jack left her to it, leaving her room and her home.

Once on the street, walking away from Alyssa and her house, he unfroze time. Keeping the ring on his finger, he began the walk home. Confident now that he was close to success.

As soon as he got Alyssa to screw her father, he'd begin working on Devyn.

He'd turn her against Drake long before the night of the dance.

And, before long, he'd have her all to himself.

The world froze.

Jack was mid-step, thinking about his sister, when it happened. The world shifted to shades of grey, true blackness coated his body, and everything around him – a billion little rain drops – stopped in place.

He stumbled in surprise, corrected himself.

"What the hell?"

He hadn't done this. Hadn't used his ring's power.

Time had frozen itself.
How was that even-
The other ring.
The White Ring.

As Damien coalesced in front of him, Jack glanced around – searching for his opposite. The one who'd stopped time.

"How close do we have to be?" Jack snapped, looking around for a weapon. "For me to get caught in his time-stop? What's the range?"

"There is no 'range'," Damien shrugged. "If one of you stops time, it stops for the other too. Even if you're on opposite sides of the planet."

"But-"

Jack stopped himself, his brain providing an answer to his argument before he could even speak it: He hadn't been wearing the Black Ring any time his counterpart had stopped time before. Today was the first time he'd worn the ring outside of frozen time.

Somewhere out there, the owner of the White Ring had just put it on – or activated it, at the very least.

"How do I find him?" Jack asked, walking forward. Frozen raindrops poked his face, soaked into his clothes as he walked through them. "Is there some way for me to sense them or track them or anything?"

Damien shrugged, smiled. "Look for someone who isn't frozen."

Not very helpful advice.

But, if it was the only thing he could do, he might as well try it. The whole world was frozen, save for Jack and whoever had the White Ring. If he saw any movement, any kind of motion at all, it couldn't be anyone but them – the one wearing the White Ring.

He ran down the street, eyes searching left and right.

Whoever they were, they'd healed Drake Damilio. That meant they had to live somewhere in the city. Not exactly a small area to search manually, but what else could he do?

He sprinted down one street, then the next. Eyes darting in every direction. No need to stop to rest, no need to breathe or slow down at all. Street after street, block after block. Jack ran and searched, constantly having to wipe rain water off his face as he went. Behind him, he left a path of open air through the frozen rain water.

For all he knew, his opposite could be inside a building – not even on the streets. Out of view. Or, the White Ring's owner could be behind Jack even now, following the Jack-shaped path through the rain right to him.

He ran, kept searching and looking. Even doubled back on himself when his paranoia got too much.

No-one following him. No one around but him. The whole world frozen.

He stopped running.

"If he resumes time, will it unfreeze for me too?"

"Yes," the shadows at his feet said.

"Can I unfreeze time for *him*?"

"No," the shadows answered. "You can unfreeze time for yourself, but it will remain frozen for them until they choose to resume it."

How long had Jack been searching already?

He'd ran down countless streets, gotten lost and un-lost several times. He'd come across his own trails in the rain more than a few times.

He kept going.

"What if he died?" Jack asked eventually. "While time's frozen. Would it stay frozen, or would it start again?"

"They're not dead," the shadows answered.

"Then what's taking them so long?!" Jack shouted – half-hoping the other ring-

wearer would hear him and come searching. "It feels like time's been frozen for *hours*. What could they possibly be doing that'd take so long?"

The shadows chuckled.

Hours. It certainly seemed like it'd been that long, running through the rain in search of motion. Any kind of movement at all.

Jack didn't feel tired – couldn't while his ring was on. He wasn't exhausted or hungry, didn't need to use the toilet. While time was frozen, so was his body in an odd kind of way.

He wasn't tired. But he was *bored*.

Bored and *wet*.

"What's taking them so long?" He muttered.

Learning, Jack guessed. Practising. Figuring out what their ring could do. How to use it. Just like Jack himself was doing with his ring.

He shook his head, continued searching the city streets.

It felt like another hour passed before time resumed. Jack – who'd been running down the middle of a street – almost got clipped by a car that'd jolted into motion in an instant. His heart started beating in his chest again – started racing after *that* close encounter.

He rushed to the side-walk, inhaled his first breath of fresh air in hours.

No sign of him – the other ring's owner.

Whoever they were, they seemed *very* eager to learn their powers – judging from how long they'd kept time frozen.

All the more reason for Jack himself to master his ring.

Damien had all but promised a confrontation between Jack and his counterpart. And so Jack needed to be prepared for it.